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THE
CANADIAN NORTH-WEST.



By SEPTIMUS FIELD.



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Many pamphlets and descriptive letters have been written by men with able pens, who have visited this country for the purpose of giving reliable information to those who may have a desire to seek "fresh fields and pastures new," but who have neither the means nor the time to spare to see it for themselves and make a choice of locality, and the result is that so much satisfactory evidence of this kind is now available that it might be supposed that there could be no more to write and little more to learn of the resources of the great Canadian North-west. But as all do not see with the same eyes, each succeeding description may still contain some new features and be read with fresh interest, and with this idea I take up my pen to jot down my opinion of the country as a field for emigration and investment.

I dare not hope that it may be a success as a literary composition, but I trust that what I write may be accepted by my brother farmers in England and elsewhere, as a practical and truthful account of what I have seen ; the conclusions I have come to being the result of three years' close personal observation on the spot, backed by a previous practical knowledge of agricultural pursuits in England, extending over a period of thirty years. The development of the land is most undoubtedly the first consideration in the Canadian North-west, and the country offers the finest field of enterprise to the agriculturist.

There are no doubt large deposits of all kinds of minerals ready to be brought to the surface when the proper time arrives, but that time will best be hastened by the settling up of the farming lands, and it is my intention to address myself therefore to the agriculturist alone ; and this I do with the greatest confidence, feeling sure that any one with any practical knowledge of farming, and capital sufficient to start with, can in this country make a home for himself and family and in a few years reap both pleasure and profit.

To those farmers in the old country whose capital is diminishing, but not yet all gone, I

more particularly address myself, and knowing the struggle they are having for existence I bid them hasten to break away from their old moorings, come out here and start afresh. To such I would advise that where possible this should be done collectively; if twenty men from one or more districts would make up their minds to come out here in a body with such capital as they can command, a good district could be chosen, their several quarter sections of 160 acres each selected, and a colony would be established at once. They would be in touch with each other and their interests being furthered by mutual intercourse and assistance, their advancement would be hastened, and success would follow, where single individuals, as sometimes happens, might tire of the isolation and the sudden abandonment of social relations with their friends. Co-operation in the use of farm machinery, stud animals, etc., would all promote the economy so necessary for new settlers. Schools would at once be formed, and everything required for the comfort and convenience of the settlers would be obtained more readily and quickly than might otherwise be the case. I most strongly advocate this system where it is at all possible to adopt it. Let me, therefore, advise any one reading this, whose circumstances may be forcing him to try this country as a means of retrieving his old position, to speak to his

neighbours and friends upon the subject, and try and form such a band and come out here under the guidance of some one familiar with the country. But failing this let him come in any case, and I am sure such a step will never be regretted.

The land is ready to fulfil all that is required of it, if properly managed. It is rich in natural grasses, and cattle quickly fatten upon them. The North-west Territories are perhaps the most suitable for mixed farming of any part of Canada, and it has often struck me as an unfortunate circumstance for the country as a whole that the most difficult lands to be brought under cultivation should have been the first to be settled upon. If all the immigration had come in on the West instead of the East of the Dominion, the country would have advanced with more rapid strides, and there would have been no such term as the "settler in the backwoods" to frighten people from coming here. Still, it is fortunate for the present generation of colonists that the best and most easily cultivated lands have been left to them to take up.

The North-west offers facilities to its pioneer settlers which are in marked contrast to the drawbacks encountered by the early eastern settlers, many of whose sons and grandsons have now come out to do in the West what their ancestors did in Eastern

Canada, but find it mere child's play in comparison.

The enormous extent of territory which is capable of successful settlement and well within the fertile belt, makes it unimportant for me to bring before the reader's notice any lands that are in a more northerly latitude ; the time may come when even these may be required, but it is not my intention to suggest the necessity of any one going further North than within easy distance of the neighbourhoods of Prince Albert and Edmonton. The present flow of settlers into these districts is, however, steadily reducing the number of "prizes" in the way of homesteads, the first comers of course securing the choicest locations. The population of the North-west Territories increased 21,276 between the date of the census of 1891 and the summer of 1894, when a census was taken by the North-west Mounted Police, i.e., in two and a half years ; still the area of good land remaining available runs up into millions of acres, and those who come now will have no difficulty in getting suited.

The country has everything to recommend it. The soil is deep and of the richest description ; well adapted for the growth of all cereals and cultivated grasses, and it is well and evenly watered and timbered, two

of the most desirable and necessary things required by the settler.

The climate is not more severe, in fact is milder in the lower Territories than in Manitoba. There is the same clearness and dryness which so greatly modifies the extreme frost in mid-winter, and it has all the early warmth of the spring months that the eastern provinces are favoured with. The western markets are increasing their demands yearly for agricultural products and are already in strong competition with the markets of Montreal and other eastern centres. So that the settler will be in as good a position if not a better one, in regard to markets for his produce than were the eastern settlers in the early days of the country. We have here, in short, a new country holding out advantages in many ways greater than were ever enjoyed by colonists of a former generation, and which an ever increasing number of people are recognizing and taking advantage of. The rising towns of Regina, the capital, and Calgary, will soon develop into manufacturing centres, where all the machinery and implements required by farmers can be produced at a lower cost than in the eastern cities. They have all the materials necessary for this at their very doors, such as wood, iron and coal, only awaiting the demand to justify the investment of capital in their development.

The progress of an agricultural country like this must be slower than that of the gold-mining districts of Australia and Africa, which have absorbed such large numbers of emigrants. But the steady settling up of the agricultural districts will bring about a more enduring state of prosperity. We have Africa now as our chief opponent in bidding for population, but there are still many who will be too wise to overlook the less glittering but more solid advantages offered by the Canadian North-west as a field for settlement.

The people of this country are just now giving increased attention to the development of dairying, and are being actively assisted thereto by the Government, and from this they will undoubtedly reap great advantages. The low cost of production, climatic influences, and great fertility of soil, must always be in the Canadians' favour when brought into competition with other countries in supplying dairy and general agricultural products, and the increased knowledge and facility in manufacturing and in bringing out perfection in quality, will make Canada a formidable competitor in the markets of the old country.

There has been a good deal said about the system of old country farming not being adapted to this, but I must say I fail to see

the force of it. Even the mode of breaking up new soil, which the farmers here lay claim to a special knowledge of, pertains to both countries, as also does the system of cropping. I do not say that the old country farmer follows the system here as far as autumn sowing goes, but he can give the Canadian some pretty straight pointers in the matter of cultivation and rotation of grain crops, and he would not, like some Canadian farmers, allow his land to become exhausted before taking measures to renovate it, and that in a proper manner. Nor would he be extravagant enough to waste his straw, when he has proved its value as a fodder for cattle at home.

The great want of a proper knowledge of cultivation has been one cause of the backward condition of this country,—the settling up of districts by inexperienced men,—men who have come out with capital but little or no experience, who by the time they have gained some of the latter, the former has taken wings and flown away, to their mortification and the getting this country a bad name, as every excuse has been given for their failure but the right one.

There is no need for a farmer to bring out anything with him, other than a fair stock of clothes and good warm underwear. Everything can be got here at a moderate price

and made to meet the requirements of the country. There is no trouble in selecting and purchasing all the stock he may require to start with, of the very best description, and at such a moderate price that will astonish him, after purchasing such stock in the old country. A little cash goes a long way here. The price of good stock of all kinds is simply ridiculous when compared with England. I do not think I am wide of the mark when I say that it is three-fourths lower than it is in England. At the time of writing three-year-old steers, that would dress 160 lbs. per quarter, are being sold at £7 each, and good milking cows of any breed at the same rate. There is money to be made by sheep here, but I must say with regret that they are not handled in a practical manner by most of the farmers who have invested in them. There are many other things that a practical farmer with capital would very soon remedy after he had been here a short time, such for instance as the time for selling sheep and cattle for shipment to England. The present system in this regard might very well, I think, be improved on, and there are many reasons why it should be changed; reasons which a practical English farmer, knowing the state of the markets at home at various times of the year, would see and take advantage of.

Let a man coming to settle in this country make up his mind never to buy a thing unless he can pay for it, and he will find the principle will contribute very greatly to his success. Let him begin with mixed farming and stick to it. He will then always have a flitch or two of bacon in his house and a fat sheep in his flock, and he can live on the produce of his farm, without going to the stores for them, as many have done and are doing now. This has been the ruin of many men here, and I speak from what I have seen. Farmers buying beef, bacon, butter, eggs and cheese from stores, taking the place of the consumer instead of being the producer. There is no country in the world where a farmer can live so well and so cheaply as he can here, and at the same time thoroughly enjoy the advantages he has in the way of sport, the produce of his gun helping out his larder wonderfully if he is fond of shooting. I have had the best of shooting in England, but have never so much enjoyed it as I have done here, merely shooting the quantity that was required for the house or presents for friends.

Another great advantage is the freedom from rents, rates and taxes, such bugbears to the English farmer. One cannot appreciate the feeling of such relief until it has been realized. The rates are very low in

the agricultural districts, especially so in the North-west Territories where municipalities are not so general. The school rate being the only one and that too trifling to be mentioned ; statute labour taking the place of money payments, such labour being generally allotted and done on the roads most used by the settler himself.

Hired labour is fast finding its proper level, and is now more in proportion to the price of meat and grain. A farmer is now able to employ a certain amount of hired labour, the price before preventing him from doing so in justice to himself. I have known several men who dated their downfall from the time they began to hire labour. So long as they confined themselves to a certain number of cattle and a limited acreage of grain, they did well, but when they began to increase them and outside labour was necessary, it soon ate up both cattle and profit until the time came when the servant hired the employer. Instances of this have come under my own observation. Many of the now thriving settlers owe their position to the wages earned from others, coupled with their own thrift, gaining capital and experience at the same time. Many others starting with capital and no experience, hired men to do the work they should have done themselves, and came to grief as above indicated.

There is now in this country an opening for any number of men with some experience and capital, (say £100 clear to start with) where both can be applied with advantage, when the same men would find such an amount as I have mentioned practically useless in England. The taking up of 160 acres of land under the homesteading conditions, is subject only to the payment of an entry fee of £2. There is no doubt that the class of settlers most needed in the North-west is the same as in any other part, that is the steady working man with moderate means, who will more likely be a permanent and successful settler than the man with larger capital going into grain or cattle on an extensive scale, or as an experimentalist. The cheapness and ease of producing wheat have in the past been sources of temptation and failure to many, who applied their capital, and that of others who believed in them, in the raising of that cereal in large quantities, flooding the grain markets at a time when the tendency to low prices was showing itself, and consequently bringing down all those connected with the venture. But a steady, progressive system in all farm products is more likely to last and to keep prices at a fair and paying rate.

The best part of the North-west to go to is the next question, and I may well say I

pause for a reply. Where all are good it is difficult to choose.

Let me take one line to start with. From Yorkton, the present terminus of the Manitoba and North-western Railway, which branches off from Winnipeg *via* Portage la Prairie, right up to Prince Albert (a distance of 250 miles), one passes through some of the finest farming land in the world ; well watered, well timbered and sufficiently open for mixed farming, one large area between Yorkton and Sheho Lake the road runs through for about 20 miles, is of a park-like appearance, and as I drove through it on my return from Fishing Lake, in May last, was perfectly enchanting, and one could not grumble were he made to pitch his tent upon any one spot. Everything looked fresh and green, the only things needed to complete the picture to a farmer's eye were human habitations, cultivated fields and herds of cattle. With the exception of a small portion of stony land between this and the Mill plains, the land is all good and inviting to settlers. The same description stands for all the rest up to Stony Creek, where there are a number of settlers, all doing well, and apparently persuaded in their own minds that they are occupying the pick of the country. Should any intending settler wish to come to this district,

the best thing for him to do is to proceed direct to Prince Albert by the Canadian Pacific Railway, by way of Regina. He will then be able to explore the district, and will readily find all that he may require. In a few years the more direct line of railway will be extended from Yorkton, when all along this projected line every acre of land will be taken up. But fortunate are those persons, who, taking time by the forelock, establish themselves along the route, in advance of the actual construction of the railway. They will not have long to wait, and their lands will be greatly enhanced in value when the road does come, but of course they must expect to have some inconveniences to put up with as pioneers, for which, however, they will be amply repaid when they find the railway at their doors.

Concluding this short pamphlet, let me impress upon my readers that I place myself in their position, and feel that I would gladly give credence to what might be written by one who has known farming in England in its best days, and is able to judge of the advantages of this country. What I have written I can say is from facts which have come under my own observation, and I can truthfully say that this is the country to come to, where true freedom reigns and every help is given to those who will try to

help themselves. I address myself as a farmer to farmers, being well aware that if the same energy is exercised here as in England to the purpose of getting a good

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help themselves. I address myself as a farmer to farmers, being well aware that if the same energy is exercised here as in England to the purpose of getting a good return for capital and labour, this is the country to do it in.

The country is one of the healthiest that can possibly be, far healthier than England in any part of it. Far be it from me that I should utter one word to draw any man from his home to come out here to meet with disappointment, but I know that the country is all that one can desire, and that there is every prospect for any industrious man to maintain himself and provide a home for his sons and daughters.

Population is the only thing the country lacks to complete the measure of its perfection, and therefore I say come, and whilst making good this deficiency do well for yourselves at the same time!

ASESSIPPI, MANITOBA,

July, 1895.